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ABSTRACT

Using an exchange theory perspective, this study evaluates the degree to which school rejection policies and racial discrimination contribute to the decision of black students to disengage from the education exchange process and drop out of school. In the exchange theory perspective the student is viewed as a party in an exchange relationship with teachers and schools. The exchange relationship will continue as long as both parties see themselves as making a "profit." The sample population studied was made up of secondary students from majority and minority groups in a southwestern community. Discriminant analysis was used to weigh the importance of a variety of factors; with an 84% correct prediction of dropouts achieved. The three most important determinants were found to be student perception of occupational structure openness, perceived school racial discrimination, and the behavior and expectations of teachers. The author suggests alternatives to the present situation, including provision of enhanced motivational and community support for minority students and community demand that schools be held accountable for maintaining student motivation and attendance. Tables of data are appended. (Author/MK)

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BLACK STUDENT DROPOUT BEHAVIOR: DISENGAGEMENT FROM SCHOOL REJECTION AND RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

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RESEARCH PROBLEM

During the past two decades national effort to provide equal educational opportunity for all young people has come under the close scrutiny of social scientists (Coleman, 1966; Mayeske, 1969; Weinberg, 1970; Jencks, 1972 and St. John, 1975). Much of the research in this area, following the lead of Coleman (1966), has used standardized achievement test scores to measure school outputs and evaluate the degree to which schools were providing equal opportunity. Equally as important a measure of the equality of educational output, especially for future occupational mobility, is the school's ability to motivate students to complete their basic educational tenure. In today's society, students who drop out before completing high school often find themselves unable to climb out of the "last hired, first fired" unskilled occupational category. One of the most replicated, central findings in research on stratification and occupational mobility (Blau and Duncan, 1967; Duncan, Featherman and Duncan, 1972; Boudon, 1973 and Coleman and Rainwater, 1978), is that the number of years of education completed is the primary determinant of occupational succe ss; more important than family background, measured intelligence or school grade point average. The number of years of schooling completed is such an important contributor to social mobility that the decision to drop out of school before high school completion is the most serious barrier to future occupational mobility and success. Schools which either lack the ability to 'hold' minority students, or refuse to accept this responsibility, in effect deny an equal educational opportunity to minority students.

Previous research on school dropouts has often viewed the decision to terminate one's education in highly, immediate, personal factors such as

the need for money, desire to be married, poor study habits, lack of interest, lack of academic ability, etc.(National Educational Association, 1964; 1965) Such a focus is one sided, however, employing a "Blame the Victim" line of reasoning. This paper investigates the problem of minority student dropout behavior, attempting to evaluate the extent to which school policies and practices influence such behavior.

THEORETICAL MODEL

Exchange theory provides a more balanced means of evaluating the interplay of individual and social factors which go into personal decisions such as the decision to dropout of school. According to Homans (1961) no exchange relationship will continue unless both partners are making a profit out of the exchange or at least think they are making a profit. According to the principle of distributive justice, the party receiving the short end of the exchange is likely to develop the emotion of anger and work to break off the disadvantageous exchange. Using this theoretical perspective, the student is viewed as one of the parties in an exchange; an educational exchange process with teachers and schools. If certain school policies and practices work to convince the student that he/she is losing in the exchange transactions (costs to the student are higher than benefits or even the promise of future benefits),the student will come to see the futility of continuing the exchange. Since students may be forced by law to continue in the exchange, anger and resentment may build up so that as soon as possible, the student will disengage from the educational exchange relationship and dropout of school.

From a review of literature on minority student achievement, school

desegregation, minority student racial attitudes and a variety of independent research studies, articles and government reports, the following theoretical model of the school's role in the educational exchange relationship with Black students is proposed.

FIGURE 1

The model suggests that as long as a minority student perceives the educational exchange process relationship to be efficacious (either in terms of immediate or future benefits over current costs) he/she will continue to remain in school. As the relationship comes to be perceived as not efficacious for the present or future, the student will disengage and leave the exchange. Three major factors are proposed as primary determinants of a minority student's perception of the efficacy of the exchange process; the student's perception of the openness of the occupational structure (what will remaining in school bring in terms of future benefits), the student's perception of racial prejudice and discrimination in school (what remaining in school brings in immediate costs), and the teacher's attitudes and expectations (what remaining in school brings in immediate benefits and/or costs). If a minority student perceives great opportunity awaiting in the occupational system, provided he/she receives a certain level of education, the student is more likely to put up with immediate, personal costs in terms of self-concept attacks and ego denigration. On the other hand, if the student perceives little opportunity awaiting the completion of additional years of education, then he/she will be less likely to continue in such costly exchange transactions and according to

the Homan's model, develop anger, disengage from the exchange and drop out of school.

Coleman (1966:163,165) reports teachers may perceive minority students as having decidedly less academic interest and ability than majority students. Such teacher's sttitudes become part of a chain of variables leading to self-fulfilling prophecy behavior on the part of minority students (St. John, 1975:95). St. John reports on several studies which document the relationship between the perceptions of student ability, the student's perception of his own ability and the student's actual achievement performance. Negative expectations and attitudes of teachers may provide a substantial contribution to poor minority student performance and therefore, add to the minority student's costs in continuing the educational exchange relationship. Charging the schools with duplicating the occupational distribution according to social class origin but making it appear to be meritocratic, Bowles and Ginits (1975) provide conjecture and some evidence to substantiate position of parental SES in the model. Not only does a student's social class position influence his/her perception of the occupational structure and its prospects,it also directly influences the attitudes and expectations of teachers and other school staff, whose subsequent behavior may work to confirm such perceptions. held by the student.

A variety of studies have provided documentation for the phenomenon known as Black exclusion or school policies of Black rejection. (Jencks, 1972; Yudof, 1973; McClung, 1973; Cohen, 1973; Children's Defense Fund of the Washington Research Project, 1974; Southern Regional Council, 1974; Van Geel, 1974; Nisbet, 1974; Elsner, 1974 and Yudof, 1975) Yudof suggests

the basic cause for the disproportionately high levels of suspension and expulsion of black students is due to institutional racism. "In short, they (black students) have assertedly engaged in institutionally inappropriate behavior, disregarding the 'hidden curriculum' or value underlying institutional public schooling. When a black student or parent refers to 'institutional racism', he is making reference to these institutional rules. He is arguing, in effect, that the institution has an obligation to alter its rules to makethem less arbitrary and more consistent with the behavior patterns among blacks. An institution which consciously applies rules which systematically disfavor blacks is a 'racist institution'." (Yudof, 1975:386)

Schools which enforce that which white parents identify as the 'need for discipline' work to maintain the hidden curriculum and the view that black youth must learn to adapt to these rules. According to the model such policies of rejection and exclusion not only encourage negative expectations of behavior among teachers but also produce excessive costs to the educational exchange process for black students, costs which the black student experiences as racial prejudice and discrimination. Even though black exclusion and rejection policies may be due more to poverty than race (Yudof, 1975:388), they are experienced by the individual minority student in racial terms and work to increase the immediate costs of the exchange relationship. In addition to the variables diagrammed in the model, the respondent's sex, GPA and measured I.Q. scores were controlled in order to isolate the effects of school policies and practices.

SAMPLE AND METHODS

Data collected for this research are part of a larger five year longitudinal study of majority and minority student self-concept and achievement in a southwestern community of about 200,000 population, with about 65% anglo, 25% black and 10% brown. Data for this paper come from the 1975-1976 school year with comparisons made with a larger, random sample of 400 9th to 12th grade students. In addition to academic and demographic information available from school records, dropouts were interviewed at home by a specially trained multi-racial, multi-ethnic team of interviewers to ascertain certain attitudinal variables and to gather information about interracial attitudes and experiences. Teachers in each of the schools were surveyed about their attitudes toward their jobs, administration, other teachers and their students, to provide a rather unique data set about school policies, school practices, teachers attitudes and behavior, as well as measures of job satisfaction. Discriminant analysis techniques are used to evaluate the relative importance of variables contributing to the disengagement of black students from the educational process. Discriminant analysis is one of a variety of multivariate techniques which allows one to mathematically weigh and combine those factors which discriminate between two groups. In this paper, the two groups are black students who have dropped out of school and black students who have not so disengaged. In addition to permitting the researcher to identify those variables which contribute most to the differentiation between the groups, discriminant analysis procedures make an independent prediction based on the weightings derived from the differentiation. "The results of any classification analysis may be summarized in a K by K classification table (or 'con-

fusion matrix'). The two dimensions of the square matrix are actual group membership and predicted group membership. ....Data from this matrix may be used to test whether the classification procedure used is significantly better than a purely random partitioning of the decision space" (Huberty, 1975:575). Operational definitions, mean scores and the intercorrelations of all variables considered in this study are given in Table 1.

TABLE 1

FINDINGS

Results of the discriminant analysis are presented in Tables 2 and 3. Table 3 presents the 'correctness' of the prediction or classification procedure given information on the eight variables included in the study. The overall rate of 84% correctly classified indicates a fairly high level of predictability, indicating the importance of the eight variables in 'separating','distinguishing', or 'discriminating' between black dropouts and black students who did not dropout. Table 2 indicates the relative strength of the 8 variables in contributing to this discrimination. Black student perception of the openness of the occupational structure X_3, is the variable that exercises the greatest effect in distinguishing between those in school and those who dropped out. Mean scores for this variable from Table 1 show that black dropouts are much more likely to perceive the occupational system as closed than black students remaining in school. From information gained in the followup interviews with the dropouts, it was evident that most of the dropouts perceived little opportunity for occupational mobility, due in part to the experience of their parents. Black dropouts appear to sense an impending futility to contiruing in school; that further schooling would only lead to the

same low paying jobs as their parents and friends have and they themselves are destined to get. Many of their friends have already dropped out of school so as to get a 'head start' in building up seniority at local factories.

The second most important difference between dropouts and those in school is the perception of amount of racial discrimination in the school, X_6. Dropouts are much more likely to experience racial discrimination in school, even in the same school as other blacks not dropping out. Additional regression analysis using perceived racial discrimination in school as the dependent variable, revealed perception to be strongly related to school policies of rejection and the expectations of teachers. Black dropouts appear to be more sensitive to the 'costs' of institutional racism than other black students, who are more likely to dismiss these 'costs' as non-racial, educational bureaucratic annoyances.

The third most important distinguishing characteristic is X_4, Teacher's Expectations. Teachers rated dropouts (about half of the dropouts at the time of data collection from the teachers had not dropped out as yet) much lower in both academic ability and motivation than non dropouts. A case by case observation of this variable indicated a non-statistically significant, clustering effect, with many of the dropouts having the same sets of teachers. Interestingly, a regression analysis using teacher's expectations as the dependent variable showed school rejection policies to be 4 times more important than parental SES in determining the attitudes and behavior of the teachers.

A non-hypothesized variable used for control purposes entered the the discriminant analysis equation as the next most critical variable.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, the measured I.Q. of black dropouts is statistically significantly higher than for those remaining in school. This would appear to contradict the teacher's observations of less ability among the dropouts. With regard to school grade point average, however, dropouts are decidedly lower. Obviously it is not the case that black dropouts cannot handle the schoolwork because it is above their ability level. From the followup interviews, dropouts indicated that school work was not that difficult, but they saw no point in working on arbitrary assignments for 'the man'. In addition, teachers often questioned the authenticity of their work when they did hand in assignments, inquiring whether they had help from a friend. Several said they saw through the 'man's game' and either would not play it or played the 'dumb' role.

The next most important variable is School Rejection Policy, X_7. Dropouts are more likely to come from schools with disproportionately high rates of minority student suspensions and expulsions. The critical importance of this variable might be overlooked because its effects are not as direct as other variables in this study. Table 4 suggests the degree of influence exercised by school rejection policies.

TABLE 4

Trichotomizing schools on the magnitude of the proportion of minority students put on suspension or expulsion reveals the effects on teachers expectations and student perception of racial discrimination. Teachers are much more likely to hold negative expectations of ability and effort if they work in schools with policies of rejection (bottom row) than in schools with little or no rejection (top row). Minority students

are more likely to perceive or 'feel' racial discrimination in those schools with rejecting policies. Only 28% of the minority students in such schools said there was little racial discrimination in their school. School Rejection Policies exercise a direct effect in lowering teacher's expectations of minority student performance and heightening minority student perception of racial discrimination. As such, school rejection policies play a major role in creating the conditions which encourage minority students to perceive the educational exchange process as a hopeless, frustrating waste of time. In follow up interviews, many of the black dropouts thought (upon reflection and not in their words) that given the practicalities and realities of their situation (low socio-economic position, discrimination by teachers and other school officials, lack of any realistic opportunity to get any better type of job by going to school than their friends did who dropped out) dropping out of school and ending the humiliation of the exchange process they were trapped into playing was a most intelligent decision.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

It is apparent in the preceding analysis thatthe Black dropouts in this study have the ability to 'do well' or as well as anyone else in school. For a variety of reasons, however, they have come to view the educational exchange process and the mobility ladder it purportedly represents to be nothing more than a frustrating cul de sac . They tend to view American society as a closed system within which they will be denied participation, regardless of their educational background. These results are congruent with other studies, especially that of Adler(1967)

who found dropouts to be quite vague about the future with little likelihood of fulfilling their aspirations through the educational process. The black student dropout in this study is typically an intelligent, motivated student who has come to view the educational system as a waste of time and too costly in exchange transactions to continue. As he/she develops this view of the educational exchange, the shift in attitude becomes manifest in behavior, viz., low grades and poor attendance. Factors which appear to highly influence the development of this attitude toward the efficacy of the educational exchange process include the lack of opportunity the dropout perceives in the occupational world beyond school, the discrimination and rejection the dropout experiences in school and the treatment he/she receives from teachers. The idea of education as a ladder for social mobility is simply inconsistant with his/her perception of life.

There are obvious implications from this research for those who are concerned that an equal educational opportunity be provided all students. One alternative to the present situation is to provide extra, 'beefed'-up motivational and black community support for these low income, intelligent, 'institutionally racist sensitive' young people. This might suggest programs similar in nature to "Operation Push" operated in association with the Reverend Jesse Jackson. Another alternative is to develop community demand that schools be held accountable for maintaining student motivation and attendance through the high school level. A school that permits and/or encourages minority students to dropout through the exercise of institutionally racist policies is a school which is failing its responsibility to provide an equal educational

opportunity for students of differing entering social, economic and cultural backgrounds. It is incumbent upon those who make and carry out school policies to insure minority students are not penalized by subtle, institutionally racist rules, practices and expectations. St. John (1975) cites several programs that might be implemented to assist in clarifying teacher and staff expectations concerning the academic performance and behavior of minority students. As suggested by Yudof (1975), since the state has assumed responsibility for the education of the young, then whatever the cause of the exclusion of blacks (direct exclusion policies or indirect through the subtle push to dropout), the state should not be allowed to shirk its responsibility. (Yudof, 1975:391) As Yudof writes,

> "Within a wide range of discretion, the state may make educational decisions for its charges, concluding that special schools, vocational training, home instruction or other non-traditional forms of learning are required. Thus institutional concerns may dictate the nature of the educational setting in which learning takes place, but it may not compel the abandonment of all educational efforts. This is particularly true in the case of the poor and minorities since rarely will they be able to afford private alternatives to public schooling". (Yudof, 1975:392)

Figure 1. Theoretical Model of the Educational Exchange Process for Minority Students

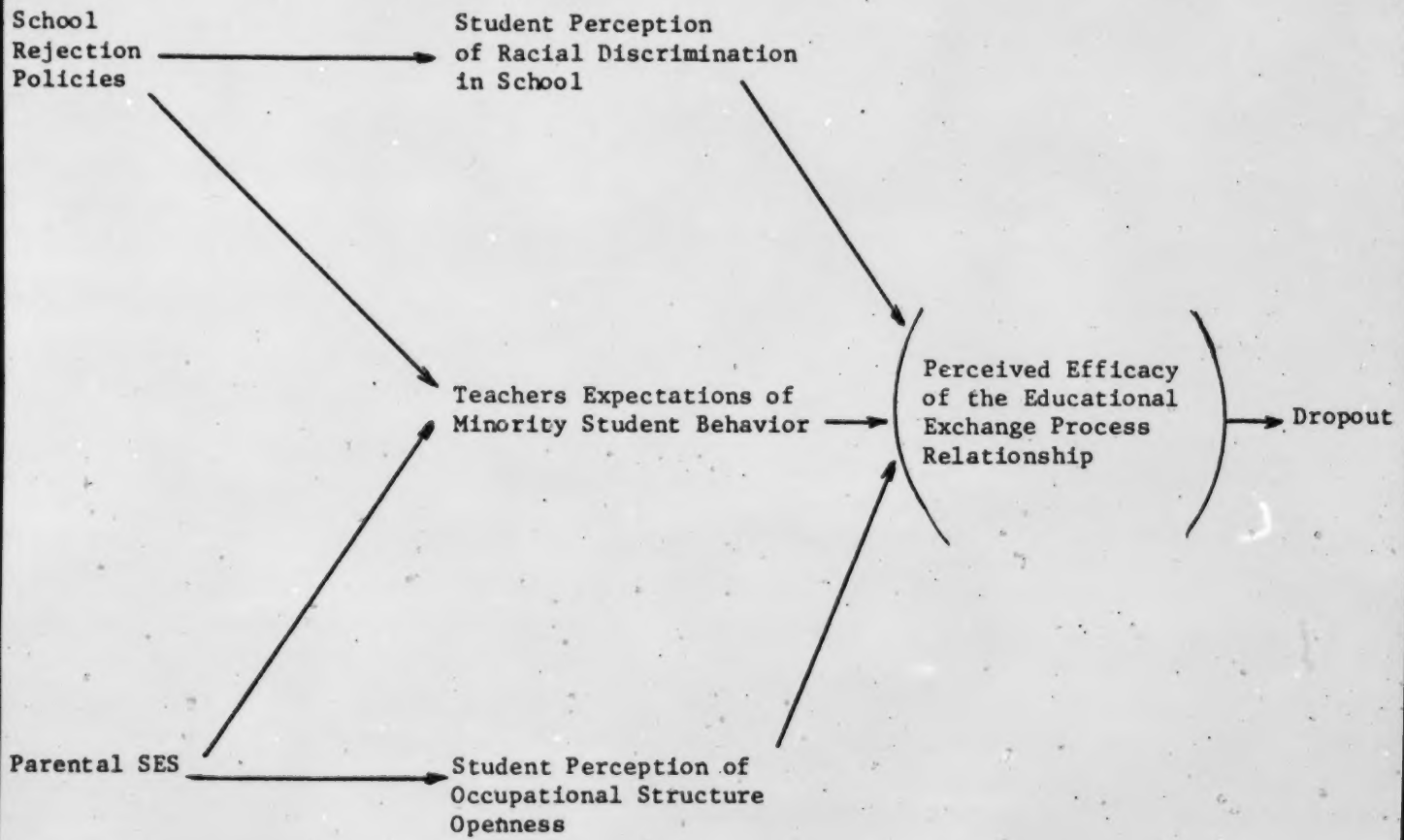
School Rejection Policies
Student Perception of Racial Discrimination in School
Teachers Expectations of Minority Student Behavior
Perceived Efficacy of the Educational Exchange Process Relationship
Dropout
Parental SES
Student Perception of Occupational Structure Openness

TABLE 1

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS, MEAN SCORES AND INTERCORRELATIONS FOR ALL VARIABLES

		X_1	X_2	X_3	X_4	X_5	X_6	X_7	X_8
X_1	Measured I.Q.	1.000	-.031	.040	.291	.357	-.148	-.121	.166
X_2	Sex of Respondent		1.000	.276	-.153	-.121	.018	-.001	.004
X_3	Perception of Occupational Structure Openness			1.000	.128	.124	.136	-.022	.150
X_4	Teacher's Expectations				1.000	.152	.101	-.235	.281
X_5	Grade Point Average					1.000	-.310	-.194	.220
X_6	Perception of School Racial Discrimination						1.000	.375	.046
X_7	School Rejection Policies							1.000	.035
X_8	Parental SES								1.000
	Mean Scores								
	Dropouts	89.1	.51	2.9	3.3	1.8	24.9	2.3	8.9
	Inschoolers	85.5	.47	8.5	6.4	3.0	14.4	1.5	12.7
	Total	86.2	.48	6.5	5.3	2.6	18.2	1.8	11.3

X_1 Operationalized by scores from the California Test of Mental Maturity administered by the school district as part of its normal testing procedures

X_2 Operationalized by a dummy variable, with males assigned 1's, females assigned 0's.

X_3 Operationalized by a scale of 1=Closed to 15= Completely open composed from responses to three items about the respondent's perception of occupational mobility for themselves, their peers and their parents.

X_4 Operationalized by a scale of 1=negative to 9=positive from measures of teacher ratings of minority student academic ability and teacher ratings of minority student effort. Scores are an aggregate of the responses of the specific number of teachers the student was assigned to in the 1975-1976 school year.

X_5 Operationalized from school records using the 4 point system.

X_6 Operationalized by a scale of 0=none to 30=high racial discrimination at school, transformed from original scores from 6 questions about racial prejudice and discrimination among the staff and fellow students.

X_7 Operationalized by taking the proportion of minority students put on suspension and/or expulsion at the school divided by the proportion of minority students at the particular school.

X_8 Operationalized by the Hollingshead Two Factor Index of Social Position and transformed to a scale in which 1=low to 50=high socio-economic status.

TABLE 2

FACTORS WHICH DISCRIMINATE BETWEEN MINORITY STUDENT DROPOUTS AND THOSE WHO REMAIN IN SCHOOL

Factors	Standardized Discriminant Function Coefficients	F to Enter or Remove	Wilk's Lambda	Significance
X_6 Perception of School Racial Discrimination	.36338	122.75664	0.82657	0.000
X_3 Perception of Occupational Structure Openness	.45987	108.58432	.70587	0.000
X_4 Teacher's Expectations	.36108	91.85858	.64413	0.000
X_1 Measured I.Q.	.34529	58.24399	.58713	0.000
X_5 Grade Point Average	.27872	36.82542	.58000	0.000
X_7 School Rejection Policies	.16285	11.63662	.57010	0.000
X_8 Parental SES	.10857	6.48675	.56857	0.001
X_2 Sex of Respondent	.08622	3.85661	.56674	0.015

Cannonical Correlation = .754 Wilk's Lambda = .56674 Chi Square = 395.886 Significance = 0.0000

TABLE 3

PREDICTED GROUP CLASSIFICATION OF MINORITY STUDENTS ACCORDING TO THE EIGHT VARIABLES USED

Actual Group Membershir	Number of Cases	Predicted Group Membership: Dropouts	Predicted Group Membership: Inschool
Dropouts	226	193 (85.4%)	33 (14.6%)
Inschool	400	69 (17.3%)	331 (82.8%)

Percent of Grouped Cases Correctly Classified by the program = 83.7%

TABLE 4

TEACHER'S EXPECTATIONS OF MINORITY STUDENT BEHAVIOR BY SCHOOL REJECTION POLICIES

School Rejection Policy Level	Teacher's Expectations		Student Perception of School Racial Discrimination
	Percent Rating Academic Ability as Good or Excellent	Percent Rating Student Effort as Good or Excellent	% Perceiving Little or no discrimination
Low Proportion (3) Suspensions and Expulsions	57% (51)	36% (51)	78% (220)
Moderate Proportion (2)	39% (48)	21% (48)	59% (122)
High Proportion (3) Suspensions and Expulsions	28% (59)	13% (59)	28% (284)
	Chi Square = 38.48 with 4 df Sig. = .000	Chi Square = 25.46 with 4 df Sig. =.000	Chi Square = 30.56 with 4 df Sig.= .000

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